10: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1945 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

(1)

THE KARENS OF BURMA

I

BACKGROUND

101 175 THE Karen people of Burma are now the second most important tribe in the country; but one hundred years ago they were called by their more powerful Burman neighbours the "Wild Cattle of the Hills".

At that time they were unorganized and lived in the dense forests that covered the country, especially in the ranges of hills that afforded them protection. They had no written language and were held in bondage to the fears that made their lives stagnant and prevented their changing the customs that they had received from their ancestors.

181 ● 131 361 563 186 They were not an aggressive people and sought security in withdrawal from the rivers, which in those days were the only lines of communication, and they built their small villages high up in the hills or other places difficult of access. Here they lived in poverty but not without hope that some day their descendants would have better times. But now like hunted birds they admonished their children as they squatted at their rude low tables to eat their rice, "Eat fast, eat fast. The Burmans may come!"

173 171 Their origin is obscure. They have no written records and the destructive wet climate has obliterated almost all

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Karen AP7

173 traces of their ancestry. Probably they originated in China
171 and came into Burma from the north-east in about the sixth or seventh century of the Christian era. Their language and personal characteristics would seem to indicate this.

101 The derivation of the term "Karen" is uncertain. It is the name by which this people have been called by the Burmese. The name by which they call themselves is *Pga K' Nyaw* which may be of Chinese origin and means "Men". They are the only real men. All other peoples are designated by their name as "Burman", "English", and so on.

II

DISTRIBUTION

101 The only part of Burma that can be called Karen
● 131 country is that lying eastward from Toungoo. Here in
563 the mountains the villages have never been dominated by their more powerful Burman neighbours and in several sections they retain their Karen names. In other sections they are known by Burmese names and show the influence of their having been overpowered at some time.

101 On the eastern slopes of the ranges which are dominat-
631 ed by Mt. Nattaung (called by the Karens *Thaw Thi*) are the three small independent states the chiefs of which are Karens. They belong to the Red Karen tribes and are called in Burmese Karen-ni. These states are Bawlekeh, Kyetpogyi and Kantarrawaddi and do not comprise a part of Burma politically except that they owe their security to the British Government with whom they have treaty relations established by the early Deputy Commissioners of Toungoo.

There are a few Karens in the ranges of hills as far

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Karen AP7

There are a few Karens in the ranges of hills as far north as a line running through Thayetmyo and Pyinmana. To the east, Loikaw is a Karen district and Karens are found farther eastward in Thailand. For the most part the Karens share their localities with the Burmans and Shans. Their villages are now found scattered over the plains as well as the hills in Lower Burma all the way from Pyinmana to Victoria Point and from Arakan to some indefinite line in Thailand. It has been reported that there are a few scattered Karen communities even as far east as Cambodia, but they have been pretty well absorbed by the more aggressive surrounding races.

During the unsettled Burmese times they clung to the hills and the remote forests for their security and wrested a precarious living there, but with the more peaceful conditions brought about by the settled British Government they spilled over into the plains and, clearing tracts of forest for villages and tracts for paddy fields, they settled down and became prosperous. Therefore they may now be found in every district of Lower Burma. In such sections as around Bassein, Pyapon, Pegu, Thaton, Moulmein, and Tavoy they comprise a very considerable minority of the population.

In the hills the Karen villages are usually at the top of a ridge. The houses are close together and in some places they are surrounded by a stockade of bamboo with sharp pickets pointing outward to reinforce the fence. There are seldom more than twenty to thirty houses in a village.

When they build on the plains they usually select a site away from the roads where they will attract least attention and be free from intrusion. Often in the villages there is little attempt at orderly arrangement of the houses.

Mo Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1923 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

CHAPTER I

HABITAT AND TRIBAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE KAREN

101 131 The Karen are a group of Indo-Chinese tribes living principally in Burma, the easternmost province of the British Indian Empire, in the Indo-Chinese peninsula, and in the adjoining country of Siam to the east. They are found between the tenth and twenty-first degrees of north latitude and between the ninety-fourth and one hundredth degrees of east longitude. The greater part of this territory they occupy in connection with the other peoples of the country, namely, the Burmese, Shan, Siamese, and Chin. 642 The only exclusively Karen country is the hilly region of the Toungoo district and the Karenni subdivision, where the Karen chiefs 161 of five states, comprising 4,830 square miles and a population of 42,240, are still in power under the Advisory Council of the British [563] Government. There is also a Karen chief ruling one of the Shan States, and five other states in that section are ruled by Taungthu chiefs. In all these latter districts we find a mixed population.[1]

101 197 The whole group of Karen tribes can be divided into three divisions, according to their language or dialect differences. These are the Sgaw, Pwo, and Bwe groups.

The Sgaw group is the largest and most widely scattered. They are found all through the Irrawaddy Delta, from the vicinity of Prome southward, and from the Arracan coast eastward to the neighborhood of Lakong in Siam and southward to the lowest point of the British possessions. The Paku and Mawnepgha tribes of the southern Toungoo Hills belong to this group. One dialect, with only slight variations, is used throughout this region.

The Pwo group comprises, besides the Pwo Karen, the Taungthu tribe, who call themselves the Pao. The Pwo are found along the seacoast from Arracan to Mergui and are said to be found nowhere more than fifty miles inland. However, I think that some of the Pwo villages in the Henzada district may be a little farther inland than that. The Taungthu are found in a section of country

[1] J. S. Scott: *Burma*, Appendix, pp. 470-481.

25: Ferrars E-5 (ca. 1890) 1901 APl Burma
Shan AP11
Karen AP7

S 101 [796]
K 101 ●131
K [361]

531. KAREN VILLAGE.

K 241

in small numbers, chiefly as pilgrims to the Buddhist shrines, of which the chief is the Shwe Dagôn, in Rangoon (p. 188).

The Karéns are the most important hill-race of the country, and best exemplify the mode of life of the quasi-aboriginal tribes, whom Burmans, Taláings, and Shans have kept out of the plain-land. The "white Karéns," Sghaw (*Sghrræw*) and Pwo, occupy the mountains between Burma and Siam. They have colonies in mountains far to the east and west, and have also spread into the plains adjoining. They call themselves *Baganyáw* (*Bghrraganyáw*), and call the Burmans *Baydw*. The Burmans call them *Kayín*, and familiarly *Tha-ngè-dyín*—play-mate, in much the same way as we say "Jack Burman" and "John Chinaman." The Karéns get their living by making hill-forest clearings (*taungya*), on which they raise one crop, and remove to fresh sites every season.

K 177

On the fringe of the mountain tracts the Karéns are more or less Burmanized, and practise Buddhism, being attracted by the prestige of the religion, with its great festivals in which everyone is free to share,—especially now that they can mingle in the towns without fear of their quondam oppressors. The barbarous *thgwin*, which the Burmans themselves are beginning to disuse, is one of the first marks of the contact of the Karén with the dominant race. The Karéns settled in the lowlands are known as Taláing-Kayín, and Bamá-Kayín. The men know Burmese, and dress like Burmans.

K [854]

K 181

The Karén is noted for truthfulness and chastity. The former characteristic is probably to be accounted for by absence of coercive *régime*, their society being, as Macpherson says of the Khonds, pervaded by

532. KAREN MOTHER AND BABE.

25: Ferrars E-5 (ca. 1890) 1901 APl Burma
Karen AP7
Karenni
Chin AP5

K 101 [199] 131 105 K [524]

248. KAREN HOOP-GAME.

The Karenni, or "Red Karéns," have a language of Karén structure, but the people recall the truculent Kachín much more than the mild Karén. They inhabit a plateau about half the size of Wales, lying between the northern limit of the White Karéns and the southern limit of Shans and Kachíns. The *Karenni* are darker-skinned than the Karéns. They use red and black colours in their clothing; the men wear short pants, sleeveless Shan jackets, and a red *gaung-baung*. The women wear a black cloth, somewhat after the manner of the Siamese women; they do most of the labour, even the tilling of the rice-fields, which are on the Shan model; but *taungya* is practised also. They brew a liquor from millet-corn, which the men always carry in their gourd. The villages are permanent, situated on points of vantage, and are stockaded. Feuds between villages are chronic and form the chief concern of the male population. Such of the Karenni as settle in the lowlands adopt the Shan civilisation and dress.

C 105

The Chins are believed by some to represent the stock from which the Burman tribes originated, and to have descended into the valley of the Irawadi from the plateau of Tibet, with the inhabitants of which the Burmans and Chins possess linguistic affinities not shared by other races of the Peninsula. The Chins are the hill-people of the mountains west of the Irawadi and its great tributary the Chindwin. The tribes are many and diverse. Towards the south and on the borders of the plains they are Burmanised in a great measure, and have dropped their primitive characteristics, notably their language. They call themselves Ashō. The black tattooing of the women's faces, which is the most distinctive of

K [286]

249. KAREN WOMAN WEAVING.